

Rx News Bulletin

Bureau of Narcotics & Dangerous Drugs

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

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Prescription Painkillers Are More Widely Used Than Tobacco, New Federal Study Finds

The Washington Post—September 20, 2016 by Christopher Ingraham

More than 1 in 3 American adults -- 35 percent -- were given painkiller prescriptions by medical providers last year. The total rate of painkiller use is even higher -- 38 percent -- when you factor in the number of adults who obtained painkillers for misuse via other means, from friends or relatives, or via drug dealers.

These numbers come from a recent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration report that highlights the stunning ubiquity of prescription painkillers in modern American life. The report indicates that in 2015, more American adults used prescription painkillers than used cigarettes, smokeless tobacco or cigars -- combined.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Americans use prescription painkillers compared to thirty-one percent (31%) of Americans that use tobacco products.

Most painkiller use isn't misuse, which SAMHSA defines as any use of painkillers in a manner not directed by a doctor. This can include taking painkillers without a prescription for the purpose of getting high, or taking the drugs for a longer period of time or at a higher quantity than recommended by a doctor.

Indeed, part of painkillers' prevalence owes to how effective they are, and to the difference they can make in the lives of pain sufferers. It's hard to imagine recovering from an invasive surgery without having something to treat the residual pain, for instance. And for many people afflicted with chronic pain, proper management with prescription painkillers can mean the difference between debilitating illness and daily functioning.

But many prescription painkillers are highly habit-forming, and they can be deadly if taken at high doses,

or in conjunction with other drugs such as alcohol. In 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, opioid painkillers killed nearly 19,000 Americans. That's greater than the total number of Americans (15,809) who were murdered that year.

Nineteen thousand (19,000) Americans died from prescription painkillers in 2014, compared to the sixteen thousand (16,000) Americans that died from homicide in 2014.

Those numbers are so high partly because Americans have developed a voracious appetite for painkillers in recent years. A 2008 study estimated that Americans consume about 80 percent of the global opioid supply and 99 percent of the supply of hydrocodone, one of the most popular prescription painkillers.

A recent investigation by the Center for Public Integrity and the Associated Press detailed the intense lobbying efforts pharmaceutical companies have made to keep these drugs lightly regulated and readily available. The investigation found that when it comes to lobbying, pro-painkiller groups outspend groups arguing for tighter restrictions by more than 200 to 1.

There are examples of pharmaceutical companies engaging in unscrupulous or illegal behavior to promote opioid drugs. In 2007 Purdue Pharma, maker of Oxycontin, pleaded guilty to charges that it misled regulators and doctors about the abuse potential of the drug.

More recently, employees at Insys Therapeutics, a manufacturer of the powerful painkiller fentanyl, plead guilty to charges involving kickback schemes for fentanyl sales. The company remains the target of numerous state and federal investigations.

SAMHSA's latest numbers indicate that painkillers are still widespread despite recent federal efforts to impose tighter restrictions on their prescription and use. It's unclear whether the 38 percent of adults using painkillers last year represents an increase or a decrease over previous years, because SAMHSA only recently added a battery of detailed prescription drug use questions to its annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Reducing the scope of the opioid epidemic has been a priority for President Obama. Earlier this year the White House requested \$1.1 billion from Congress for fighting opioid addiction.

But critics have argued that Drug Enforcement Administration policies -- some long-standing, some new -- are undercutting federal efforts to curb opioid abuse.

Updating the List of Controlled Substances

The list of all controlled substances in Missouri are listed in statute in Section 195.017, RSMo 2000. Since the legislature is not always in session, the department is directed by statute to update the list of controlled substances by rule. This can make the state regulation more up to date than what is listed in the statute. The department plans filed the proposed amended rule on September 30, 2016. Once the proposed rule is published in the Missouri Register, there will be a 30-day comment period.

BNDD Registrant Statistics

LICENSURE TYPE	NUMBERS
Advance Practice Nurses	1,025
Ambulatory Surgery Centers	113
Analytical Labs	55
Business Researchers	139
Correctional Centers	34
Distributors	39
Dentist DDM	605
Dentist DDS	2,255
Doctor of Optometry	682
Doctor of Osteopathy	2,918
Doctor of Podiatric Medicine	274
Doctor of Veterinary Medicine	1,857
Emergency Medical Services	337
Exporters	13
Hospice	4
Hospitals	174
Importers	11
LTCF Dispensing Machines	35
LTCF Emergency Kits	554
Medical Doctor (MD)	17,616
Mental Health Facility	4
Narcotic Treatment Program	16
Pharmacies	1,370
Physician's Assistant	234
Researcher (Individual)	149
Teaching Institution	8
27 TYPES	30,521

National Association of State Controlled Substance Authorities

The Missouri BNDD is a voting member of this 50-state organization. The organization is made up of the state controlled substance administrators as well as members of prescription monitoring programs and industries such as manufacturers and distributors. BNDD attended the annual training meeting in October to review and discuss prescription monitoring, cannabidiol (CBD) laws, drug diversion in healthcare settings, drug disposal methods, and legislative updates from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration.

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